

earned the right to American citizenship. Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to continue to fight for a pathway to citizenship for millions of individuals like Gregoria and Jose.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

(Mr. SCHIFF asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SCHIFF. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Equal Healthcare for All Act. Federal law protects against discrimination in housing, schooling, and employment.

But equitable access to healthcare remains broadly unprotected, the consequences of which are deadly: for Black women who are more likely to die during childbirth, for Hispanic individuals who suffer from higher rates of chronic diseases, for LGBTQ individuals who postpone medical treatment for fear of discrimination.

For the first time in our Nation's history, my bill would make equitable healthcare a protected civil right. And it will be another important step towards breaking down the barriers of discrimination in our country.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank Dwayne Hall, a community leader and good friend, for his efforts to conceptualize and advance this bill. The importance of those efforts cannot be understated.

BETTER MANAGEMENT FOR OUR FEDERAL FORESTS

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Madam Speaker, I just wanted to point out, as a result of the over 2 million acres of fire that have happened in California, the next thing that happens is when the winter comes, and the rains come—like we are having so much now—the deluge of rain caused after the forest fires because of unmanaged forests the erosion that we are seeing here.

This example here is Highway 70 running through Butte County and Plumas County. The rockslide you see here is part of the fire scar. So when we lose all that foliage, you get erosion.

What does erosion mean? Not just the highway being closed, but this washes into, in this case Feather River, on down into Lake Oroville, which is a water source for 25 million people in California.

So why is this important? Because we have to do a much better job of managing our Federal forests, our Federal lands, and we are not doing that. We are not doing it speedily enough because we have so much to catch up on, yet every year millions of acres of forest land burn. This is just one of the results here.

The lost transportation. The water quality that affects so many people is

going to be negatively affected by this lack of action. We need the Forest Service to move rapidly towards not only mitigating the fires from this year with erosion, but also manage these lands so we don't have these horrific fires.

GO ASTROS

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I want everybody to know there is breaking news, and you are going to see something exciting on the floor of the House tomorrow.

First of all, Go Astros. The big orange is rolling into Atlanta. And I know the red, white, and blue is in Atlanta, called the Braves. But we are coming in because there is nothing more meteoric than the Astros.

And breaking news, we will be on the floor tomorrow with some exciting challenges. Go Astros, all the way to the World Series.

But I don't mind accepting a challenge, and tomorrow I think we will have some folks from Atlanta and Georgia and some folks from Texas and Houston on the floor tomorrow with some breaking news. Go Astros.

HELP FOR OUR RETURNING SERVICEMEN AND SERVICEWOMEN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ZELDIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members be given 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials on the topic of our Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, our servicemen and—women have sacrificed so much in their courageous fight for our exceptional Nation and our freedoms. Unfortunately, when our veterans return home from the battlefield, too often they find that their fight has just begun.

My home county in New York, Suffolk, boasts one of the highest concentrations of veterans in the country, and we pride ourselves on our rich history and commitment to serving our Nation's veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that approximately 20 veterans per day take their own life, oftentimes plagued with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

One of those suffering was PFC Joseph Dwyer, an Iraq war veteran from

Mount Sinai, New York. As an Army combat medic, PFC Dwyer was the face of the Iraq war. In 2003, this photo next to me was taken of Joe carrying an injured Iraqi child to safety, and it went viral worldwide.

Unfortunately, when he came back home to Long Island he returned with the mental wounds of war, and after years of struggling, he lost his battle with PTSD in 2008. It is important to note that Joe didn't commit suicide. He was seeking temporary relief from his pain, and his last words were: I don't want to die.

Understanding that PFC Dwyer was just one of the local veterans struggling, I created the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer Support Program as a New York State senator in 2012. The Dwyer program is modeled as a peer-to-peer support program for veterans struggling with PTSD and TBI.

This model provides a safe, confidential, and educational platform where all veterans are welcome to meet with other veterans in support of each other's successful transition to post-service life and seeks to build vet-to-vet relationships that enhance positive change.

The Dwyer program also incorporates a variety of therapeutic activities, such as horse training and fishing that provide for common experiences, learning, and personal growth.

Suffolk County served as one of four test counties in New York, and since then, with the dedication and hard work of so many exceptional men and women, the program has successfully expanded to more than 25 counties across New York, saving lives and assisting tens of thousands of New York veterans battling PTSD and TBI.

The program has been so successful that the New York State budget for fiscal year 2022 included a 22 percent increase in funding for the Dwyer program. The way the program is organized, by providing grants to localities, it has allowed each county to customize its individual program to fit individual needs and resources they have available while running an efficient and effective program.

Each county only receives between \$100,000 and \$300,000 from the State, and what they manage to do with that money is incredible.

Its continued track record of success is why I introduced bipartisan legislation, H.R. 1476, the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act, to expand the Dwyer program nationally by authorizing the VA Secretary to make grants available to State and local entities, to carry out peer-to-peer mental health programs all across our Nation and help ensure that all of our Nation's veterans have access to the support they need.

This important legislation has earned the support of 14 veteran advocacy organizations, including: The American Legion, Military Veterans Advocacy, Blinded Veterans Association, Military Order of the Purple

Heart, American Ex-Prisoners of War, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Catholic War Veterans, New York City Veterans Alliance, Jewish War Veterans, the Fleet Reserve Association, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Wounded Warrior Project, AMVETS, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

It has also been cosponsored by 36 of my colleagues, both Republicans and Democrats, some of whom we will hear from this evening about the importance of this legislation and improving the resources and care we provide to our Nation's heroes as they make the difficult transition to civilian life.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA), who is a leader in this effort fighting for our veterans and is a cosponsor of H.R. 1476.

□ 1615

Mr. COSTA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of the Private First Class Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act. I want to thank my colleague, Representative ZELDIN, for his good work and his efforts on behalf of veterans who serve our country with great honor.

Roughly 15 million adults in the United States suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, otherwise known as PTSD. The Department of Veterans Affairs indicates that between 15 and 30 percent of Vietnam veterans have had post-traumatic stress disorder in their lifetime; about 12 percent of Desert Storm veterans have had post-traumatic stress disorder; and between 11 and 20 percent of those who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom now also, sadly, have been subject to post-traumatic stress disorder in a given year.

These statistics are staggering, and, sadly, because of PTSD, many veterans have taken their lives. Our servicemen and -women sacrifice so much to protect our freedom, and we must do all we can to help them recover and prevent these tragic losses.

In 2013 the State of New York, under the leadership of Representative ZELDIN and others, established the Dwyer program to support veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, otherwise referred to as TBI, by connecting veterans with other veterans who suffer through similar struggles. Over the years, the program has created a safe, confidential, and educational network for thousands of veterans to support each other on their transition to post-service life; and this is so important.

The Veterans Administration has found that one key part to help our veterans is to ensure that they feel connected to their communities and know that they are not alone in their struggles that they face and that they can come back and become a contributing member to their community as they were when they left. Expanding

the Dwyer program nationwide, therefore, is crucial to save lives and help our veterans successfully transition to civilian life when they come home.

The San Joaquin Valley of California, which I am honored to represent, is home to nearly 30,000 veterans. Throughout my time in Congress, veterans and their families have been one of my top priorities. I have spent 17 years working side by side with the Veterans Administration assisting veterans with PTSD, creating a veterans' home, expanding veterans' healthcare, and providing a whole host of efforts that deal with post-traumatic stress disorder and pending claims for service-connected benefits. When we support them, we also must never forget about their families because it is both them and their families.

Next month on November 11 we are going to celebrate Veterans Day, and I can't think of a better thing that we can all do than to work on this legislation successfully and say thank you to those who have served our Nation. I am a proud cosponsor of this bipartisan legislation to provide our veterans with the support, healthcare, and treatment they have earned and, therefore, that they deserve. This nationwide expansion is long overdue.

I want to congratulate and thank my colleagues for their efforts. We can do more, and we must do more. Every veteran counts on us to do our part because they have done theirs.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congressman COSTA so much for his leadership and advocacy. It is so important that from coast to coast every veteran in the United States of America knows that there are people in their community who would drop everything at a moment's notice in the middle of the night to provide that love and support to get them through their difficult times. Every veteran should have access to a program like this, and I appreciate the gentleman's leadership.

Mr. COSTA. I commend the gentleman and my colleagues on this effort. It is very important, and it is the right thing to do.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, Congressman MIKE GARCIA is another cosponsor of H.R. 1476. He was a Navy fighter pilot. We are not going to hold that against him. We are still just getting close here to an Army-Navy game.

But what we find is that different generations serving in different branches and different conflicts, whether it is in peacetime or wartime, we have so many veterans who have stepped up. Congressman MIKE GARCIA sure has done his part. It is an honor to serve with him now here in the House.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. GARCIA), who is a cosponsor of H.R. 1476.

Mr. GARCIA of California. Madam Speaker, I look forward to maybe more contested Army-Navy games in the near term.

Madam Speaker, in our battle against our internal demons, there is

nothing more powerful than veterans helping other veterans. I rise today to discuss the need to support our veterans battling post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, otherwise known as TBI. Prior to coming to Congress I served in the U.S. Navy as an F/A-18 strike fighter pilot. I served from the age of 18 until the age of 36. I was honored to fly combat missions during the first 6 months of Operation Iraqi Freedom over the skies of Baghdad, Fallujah and Tikrit in 2001 in support of our soldiers and marines on the ground.

As a veteran myself, I understand that individuals serving in the military or those who have served often take pride in their ability to compartmentalize things or to compartmentalize events in their minds. This is how we cope. But during my journey I lost too many friends, and many of them to suicide, because they thought they were able to compartmentalize when in reality they needed the help.

When someone makes a decision to leave the military, they often think that by going back to the real world they will lose their experiences and that the memories that terrorize many of us will come off with the uniform. This simply could not be further from the truth. The memories are always there weighing on you mentally, physically, and emotionally. This is why it is crucial that we raise awareness for those dealing with PTSD or TBI.

The mental toughness taught in the military does not mean staying silent or not reaching out for help. Instead, I believe that receiving help and talking with a professional or a fellow veteran shows resilience. It shows you are longing to heal, Madam Speaker, so you can be a better spouse and you can be a better parent and a better friend. That is what real toughness looks like.

It is abundantly clear that there is a dire need to improve access to the critical mental health resources for our veterans battling PTSD and TBI. This is what H.R. 1476 does. And I commend Representative ZELDIN for introducing the bipartisan bill, the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act, which would establish a peer-to-peer support program for military veterans suffering from PTSD and TBI.

Private First Class Joseph P. Dwyer, an Iraq war veteran, is just one example of a life taken too soon because of PTSD acquired during his time of service. There is a bond amongst those who have served that cannot be broken, and this program will create efforts that take into account this bond and this friendship and this kinship, and it provides a way for veterans to heal alongside one another.

Madam Speaker, I strongly support this legislation and encourage others to do the same. Our precious warriors deserve our support. Our precious warriors and their families need our support.

God bless all those who serve.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, the gentleman just said something that

really struck with me as he reflects on people he served with who lost their lives due to PTSD.

I have actually known more people in the military who have lost their lives due to PTSD than have lost their lives in combat. When we were deciding whether or not to create a program like this and we created a veterans' advisory panel to design the proposal, one of the members was someone named John Jennings. Right before we had our first meeting, John lost his battle due to PTSD, and we named it the John P. Jennings Veterans' Advisory Panel. But these stories for many post-9/11 veterans—and it was called something else in decades and generations past, it seems like each time there has been a conflict it has had a different name—so many veterans have been impacted actually losing more friends due to PTSD than in combat.

My colleague from New York, CHRIS JACOBS, who is a cosponsor of H.R. 1476, comes from a part of the State that I actually had just visited. They have successful Dwyer models now in his region, too. Veterans of all generations and proud veteran supporters all throughout CHRIS JACOBS' district are looking to find ways to tell the story of how the Dwyer program is working for them and in other areas looking for ways to expand it to go further. Every minute since he has been here, CHRIS JACOBS has been an outstanding leader for our veterans and our veteran community. Of course, he is cosponsoring this legislation because he doesn't waste any opportunity to do everything in his power to help fight for vets.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. JACOBS).

Mr. JACOBS of New York. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his service and sacrifice to our country.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support, as well, of H.R. 1476 to allocate more resources to our American heroes struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and traumatic brain injury.

Madam Speaker, as we become more aware of mental health, we must ensure that we make every possible effort to help those who served our Nation and are now struggling. It is estimated that 11 to 20 percent of veterans suffer from PTSD, and almost 500,000 veterans have suffered a TBI in the past 20 years.

These injuries were incurred protecting our Nation and defending our freedom across numerous wars. Certainly this conversation surrounding mental health has gained a new national spotlight in the past number of months as veterans witnessed the chaotic and reckless withdrawal from Afghanistan. My office has received numerous calls from veterans in my district who are deeply disturbed by the events we have witnessed, and many are experiencing new grief and pain.

Similarly, it was reported that the veterans crisis hotline saw a recent

surge in both texts and calls from veterans struggling with mental health around the Nation.

There is no greater honor or act of selflessness than to sign up to serve our Nation in our military. We have a moral and sworn obligation to protect those who sacrificed protecting us, and we have an obligation to ensure any veteran can access the resources they need.

I proudly cosponsored the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act as one solution to this complex problem. I would say I knew full well how well this program operated as a member of the State senate trying to carry on the great work and the creation of Congressman ZELDIN when he was in the State senate. I want to thank him for his leadership on this issue and carrying this forward to the Federal level so more areas can benefit from it.

Supporting our veterans is a bipartisan issue we can all get behind. There is no room to debate this issue, only room for action to help our American heroes.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring H.R. 1476, and I urge this body to move efficiently to provide more mental health and brain injury resources to hundreds of thousands of veterans across the Nation who desperately need it. I am grateful for this opportunity.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, Congressman JACOBS, as he mentioned, was a member of the New York State Senate, and every single year it was a budget battle to get this money in that final budget. Thanks to Chris' efforts working on both sides of the aisle in both the New York State Senate and New York State Assembly, it didn't just continue to get funded but it expanded, and it is now in his region very successfully.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for being here and for his cosponsorship.

Congressman MADISON CAWTHORN with North Carolina's 11th District is a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. He is a cosponsor of H.R. 1476. He is all in on that committee to fight for our veterans to make sure that the Department of Veterans Affairs is being run as effectively and efficiently as possible and there are a whole lot of Americans all across this country who know that as MADISON CAWTHORN has their back as a member of this committee. We are all proud of him and glad he is here in the House with us. We are honored to have him as a cosponsor.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. CAWTHORN).

Mr. CAWTHORN. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

I will say that I am proud to be a cosponsor on his bill. I think it is far past time that Congress start taking the mental health requirements, neces-

sities, and needs of our veterans' community more seriously. Not only does this mean just sending more money to it, it means thinking outside of the box; and I think that is exactly what the gentleman's bill does.

I will tell you, Madam Speaker, when we start thinking about the debt that our Nation owes to this Nation's veterans, we realize that the debt can never truly be repaid. But certainly we can make sure that not 23 servicemembers—veterans—are committing suicide every single day. Certainly we can make sure that the telehealth program within the VA is expanded so that people can have easy mental checkups that won't deem them as someone who is mentally unfit.

□ 1630

Certainly, this means that we can take a proactive manner in making sure that our veterans feel safe and feel as if they can come forward and speak about the mental health issues that they are facing.

So many servicemembers are dying. I believe the gentleman from New York remarked earlier that one of our members of this committee said that they actually knew more people who had committed suicide since returning home from the battlefield than had actually died on the battlefield, and that is truly heartbreaking.

When they come home to America, they should be greeted as our Nation's heroes because that is exactly what they are.

It is my honor to cosponsor this bill. It is my honor to support the mental health needs of our veteran community. And it is my honor to fight for them every single day.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his leadership.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congressman CAWTHORN, and I am not surprised that he is a cosponsor of this bill. He very eloquently stated the need to think outside the box.

People go for help, and there are some people who just always thought, Congressman RUTHERFORD, that the answer is just to provide a medication. They weren't thinking outside the box.

I remember people were showing up sick to PT. They would go to the infirmary complaining, and they were diagnosing Tylenol and codeine. You have a headache, Tylenol and codeine. You need knee surgery? Well, here is Tylenol and codeine. Whatever it was, it was just all over the base. It was the instinctive response.

I think, for a while, the Department of Veterans Affairs thought that that was the only answer.

We have a county sheriff who, in many ways, I look to him as the sheriff here in the House. He is also a cosponsor of H.R. 1476. He is someone who knows his purpose here in the House, a principled man, a fighter. His constituents are very lucky to have him in Florida's Fourth Congressional District. And he gets it.

That is why he has been all in fighting for veterans every day that he has been here.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RUTHERFORD).

Mr. RUTHERFORD. I thank my good friend from New York for his kind words.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss something that affects far too many of our veterans around the country. Every year in America, thousands of young men and women, they raise their right hands and take that oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

They take this oath with the full knowledge of the risks associated with military service. They may be shipped off to a dangerous place. They may be required to have courage under fire. And like scores of American heroes who have paid the ultimate sacrifice throughout our history, they may even lay down their lives as well.

Madam Speaker, what these men and women did not sign up for is the torment that follows too many after their service is complete. In fact, for some, the toughest battle that they will face comes after they leave the military.

Over the last 2 years, Americans have weathered the COVID-19 pandemic. But I tell you, there is another pandemic raging in our veteran community. Every single day, over 20 veterans take their lives—every single day.

Since 9/11, we have lost four times as many veterans and Active Duty servicemembers to suicide than we have to combat—four times more to suicide than combat. This pandemic may not get the front-page attention in the media, but for those battling PTSD, TBI, and other forms of service-connected trauma, it is personal, and it is real.

We owe not only a debt of gratitude to those who have served but also a commitment that we are there for them throughout their lives. That is why I am proud to support the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act because I know it works.

This bipartisan legislation expands an already proven, successful peer-to-peer support program for veterans suffering from PTSD and TBI. This program, as I said, has already been proven to be effective therapy across the State of New York. It is time to bring this to veterans in every corner of the United States to save those lives.

I want to thank my good friend, Congressman LEE ZELDIN, for filing this bill, this very important bill.

Madam Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this bill and continue to fight for those who have so bravely fought for us.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, here, in the Halls of Congress, you hear millions, billions, trillions get thrown around, big dollar numbers. What has been so amazing is that a county gets \$180,000, saving countless lives, seeing

families staying together, people being able to stay in their jobs, and communities are stronger.

It is so efficient, and that, I think, is one of the keys of success because there are people in our communities who want to volunteer their specialties. There is a social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist. There is someone who wants to provide food to that barbecue, a venue for a meeting. They want to give back.

There are a lot of people I come across all the time who say that their only regret in life is that they never served. They wanted to serve and didn't do it, and that is their biggest regret in life. They are finding ways to serve.

The gentleman is stepping up in a huge way, and it is something that I would be excited to see in his congressional district in Florida.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. I would, too. I will tell the gentleman, listening to him speak, it reminds me that this is not even just about those servicemembers. We talk about the 20 to 23 number that take their lives every day. But there are thousands of family members and friends who are affected by those deaths. So this is not only for our servicemembers. It is also for all of their families and friends and loved ones. I thank the gentleman for this bill.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, I have seen that, too. There is a spouse out there who is seeing their loved one struggling with post-traumatic stress, and they don't know what to do to help. They are reaching out to the local veterans service office. They are reaching out to their local Dwyer program because they want to help their loved one. They want to keep their marriage together. They don't want everything to fall apart.

The specialty, the expertise here, is not just about providing that support and help to the servicemember. When one person serves in the military, just like you were a sheriff, when one person serves in law enforcement, the whole family serves. You come home with the mental wounds of war, and really, in a way, the whole family is experiencing the mental wounds of war.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. I will tell the gentleman, it is proven in New York. It is actually proven in northeast Florida. We have a peer-to-peer program that is called Fire Watch, which has been incredibly successful just recently.

That is why I was excited to see this bill because I know from Fire Watch, and I know from the results that you all have had in the great State of New York, just how important this is to saving lives.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, I remember when I first got here to the House, and there was somebody with a national veterans service office who was advocating for peer-to-peer support. I asked this national commander what he had in mind, what he envisioned, what his model was for how to provide peer-to-peer support.

I wasn't trying to ask it as some type of a trick question, a gotcha question, but I realized, in his answer, he didn't really know. He knew that he was supposed to advocate for peer-to-peer support, but he didn't know exactly what that model was going to look like.

Then, over the course of these last few years, more of these national veterans service organizations have been looking at what is going on in New York. Now they come to the Halls of Congress and are testifying in front of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. They talk about peer support, and they specifically are citing the Dwyer program as that model.

I saw, at a place called the Warrior Ranch in Suffolk County, a veteran who is struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder be placed in this area with a wild horse that was just rescued. He had never interacted with horses before. Within minutes—he had some training as to how to understand what the horse is thinking, how to take charge, realizing that the horse is going to be testing you out a little bit as to who is in charge. He took charge of that situation, and he immediately developed this bond with this horse.

I was speaking to someone who barely survived his own struggle with post-traumatic stress. He is upstate New York. Through a similar program, he developed a bond with a horse, and it was so strong that the owner of this ranch would allow him to come in the middle of the night if he was having a bad night and spend some time with this horse. That was how he got through his tough time.

I mean, he is healthy. He is doing great. He is a leader in his community, with the veterans community specifically. And he credits that interaction he had with a horse.

Others, it is fly-fishing. Others, it is having access to a companion animal.

The answer is not just to medicate a person with mental health issues. You need to find other alternative ways to try to assist these men and women in need.

It is not just veterans, although here we are specifically talking about veterans with the mental wounds of war. A lot of the examples that could be provided of success with the Dwyer program can be replicated for others who are nonveterans who have mental health challenges in this country.

The Dwyer program has made a lifesaving impact in our State. I have received a few testimonials.

Danielle is an Army veteran enrolled in the Suffolk County Dwyer program. She stated:

I started the Dwyer program back in April 2020 because the internship program I was in was no longer an option during COVID-19. I was a single mother who was furloughed and attempting graduate school through virtual means, which was extremely taxing on my mental health.

The support group grew into a sisterhood of not only emotional and spiritual support but guidance and education on the resources available to us and that female veterans

must continue to fight for their needs as a special population.

I owe everything to this magnetic group for being the positive guidance I needed to continue my service, complete my educational goals, and become employed at an agency that truly cares about veterans' special needs.

In Suffolk, that program is led by Thomas Ronayne and Marcelle Leis and a number of others. They are all in. They have dedicated their lives toward making it a huge success. They certainly impacted Danielle's life.

They also impacted Robert's life. He is a Navy veteran and a Suffolk County Dwyer program participant who said:

I was struggling with both substance abuse and use and thoughts of self-harm, as well as a suicide attempt.

This program, and those involved, helped me battle all this, and I now have over 5 years sober, a family, two degrees, and a new career.

Roger is a Marine Corps veteran, a Purple Heart recipient, and a Suffolk County Dwyer program participant. He said:

You have to be mentally ready to say to yourself, I need something. I need to reach out to somebody somewhere, because even though it takes a tremendous amount of courage and dedication to join the military, it takes just as much courage and dedication to be able to express that you have an issue with your life because of your experiences through the military. I am really happy for the Dwyer program because it gives us the outlet we need, because veterans only relate to other veterans.

Judy is from Suffolk County. She said:

I am a psychiatric RN with 33 years clinical experience. During that time, I have treated veterans with PTSD and traumatic brain injury. As these issues are long term, the problem has always been providing support after hospitalization. There have been no resources in the community until Dwyer came along.

Now there is a strong helping hand to support these heroes. But it needs to be expanded to accomplish more. Without it, veterans face repeated hospitalizations, resulting in premature and unnecessary deaths.

Arthur is a Vietnam veteran from Suffolk County. He said:

As a combat vet of the Vietnam war, I can relate to the need for the Dwyer program. When I returned home from Vietnam, there were no support services that I was aware of. I went from my duty station in Vietnam to CONUS in 3 days, no adjustment.

I am not alone, as there are many Vietnam vets that are suffering even today. I believe that not adjusting to civilian life sets back an individual's progress and assimilation back into society.

□ 1645

I will give you one last testimonial, and I would like to be able to introduce my friend, BUDDY CARTER from Georgia.

Anthony is a Suffolk County Dwyer program participant. He said: I have personally seen how veterans, myself being a disabled veteran included, show up to a meeting, and they are provided with food, drinks, and a safe and secure environment to share veteran-related issues with other veterans and receive

positive, supportive feedback that significantly improves their quality of life. I am happy to support this program and be involved in any way possible.

Congressman BUDDY CARTER and I were elected in 2014. He is a friend. He is a great public servant. He has a number of specialties that bring diversity here to our Chamber. A number of times, based off of his civilian experiences in life, he has made letters, requests, and legislation all better and stronger when he has weighed in.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CARTER), who is my friend and a cosponsor of H.R. 1476.

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Madam Speaker, this afternoon, I am pleased to join many of my colleagues to discuss the crucial need to improve access to critical mental health resources for veterans battling post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and traumatic brain injury, TBI.

Georgia's First Congressional District, which I have the honor and privilege of representing, has a strong presence from each branch of the military, with 61,000 Active Duty servicemembers.

We are home to four major military bases: Fort Stewart, Hunter Army Airfield, Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base, and Moody Air Force Base.

My district is also home to over 50,000 veterans. Approximately 19,000 of these veterans are post-9/11 veterans, 14,000 are Gulf war veterans, 15,000 are Vietnam war veterans, 1,800 are Korean war veterans, and nearly 200 are World War II veterans.

Suicide is a major issue, not just within Georgia's First District, but one across our entire Nation as well.

The Department of Veterans Affairs reports that an estimated 20 veterans a day commit suicide. Madam Speaker, that is totally unacceptable. Twenty servicemembers, 20 veterans a day committing suicide. It is a sad thought that 20 of our veterans and servicemembers are taking their own lives after returning home.

Even worse, a recent study released this past summer by the Costs of War Project found that servicemembers and veterans are four times more likely to have committed suicide than those who lost their lives in combat. This is an epidemic.

We are losing more veterans on our home front than we have fighting the global war on terrorism. It affects not only the veterans suffering from mental stress but their families, friends, and loved ones they leave behind.

The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 11 to 20 percent of veterans who deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom will have PTSD in a given year, compared to veterans of Desert Storm and Vietnam, who will suffer from PTSD at a rate of 12 and 30 percent, respectively.

As many as 23 percent of combat veterans who have returned home from

Iraq and Afghanistan have come back with a traumatic brain injury. The reason why these statistics are so alarming is the increased risk factors veterans with PTSD and TBI have for committing suicide.

Veterans who suffer from PTSD are four times more likely to commit suicide than those veterans without PTSD, while veterans with a TBI are twice as likely to commit suicide than those without one.

That is why I stand here today with my colleagues and pledge we work together in passing crucial legislation needed to improve access to critical mental health resources for our veterans.

One critical piece of legislation that I was proud to cosponsor is H.R. 1476, the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act, which has been offered by my friend and colleague, Representative LEE ZELDIN. This bill will expand veteran peer-to-peer support programs nationally and help veterans suffering from PTSD and TBI. It is imperative that veterans receive the care they need and to prevent this ongoing crisis.

Over 60 percent of the veterans that died by suicide in 2018 did not visit the VA in the year of their death or the previous year. Again, over 60 percent of the veterans that died by suicide in 2018 did not visit the VA in the year of their death or the previous year.

While the VA offers different types of treatment for veterans who are battling with PTSD and TBI, we need to ensure that veterans are aware of the programs available to them and remind them that they are not alone.

That is also why earlier this month I cosigned a letter led by my friend Representative DAVID JOYCE to Secretary McDonough. This letter urged the VA to develop a comprehensive plan to connect veterans of the war in Afghanistan and the global war on terrorism to essential VA benefits and services as soon as possible.

As I mentioned, Georgia's First Congressional District is home to a large military and veteran community. We have several veteran nonprofit organizations who focus on providing peer-to-peer support for veterans who suffer from PTSD.

The PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program Act will ensure that all veterans have access to a safe and confidential peer-to-peer platform. I wholeheartedly believe this will help lower the number of veterans who commit suicide in our country each day.

One death is too many.

Madam Speaker, I thank my friend from New York for organizing this today. His efforts are appreciated, they are recognized, and we thank him for that.

Mr. ZELDIN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congressman BUDDY CARTER of Georgia for being here and for cosponsoring this bipartisan bill. There are a lot of people on both sides of the aisle who have signed on, on this effort.

Congressman CARTER has the expertise to understand what has been a

longtime, conventional treatment, where doctors would just be prescribing a medication. The value of thinking outside the box has just saved so many lives. To be able to bring this program to Georgia, to Florida, to California, all across our entire Nation, would be enormous.

I want to thank all my colleagues who joined me here today in sharing stories of veterans they represent or served with during their time in the military, and some of their own experiences. I look forward to continuing to work with each of them to expand and improve access to lifesaving mental health resources for our veterans suffering from PTSD and TBI.

We are less than 2 months removed from the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks and less than 3 months since the withdrawal of Afghanistan. The tragic events that unfolded in Afghanistan were hard for Americans to watch, including many Afghanistan vets who are speaking out.

What was interesting to note, and not surprising for many, as we are having our individual conversations, especially with the Afghan vets, the calls rose to the Veterans Crisis Line, online chats with the crisis line staff were up almost 40 percent, and texts to the crisis line rose by 98 percent.

For me, my life could be separated into two parts. I am 41 years old. Half of my life was before September 11, 2001; half of my life was after September 11, 2001. But what is so amazing about those who are currently serving, so many of them, and those who are contacting our offices looking for congressional nominations to go to a service academy, all they know is life post-September 11, 2001. They either weren't born yet or they are just too young to remember.

Everyone who is here in this Chamber now, every one of us probably vividly remembers exactly where we were on September 11, 2001. For these people who are signing up right now, to think that their whole life is everything we have seen post-9/11 and they still raise their hand and answer the call. We have a duty to look out for them, in some way to try to give back, because they are willing to give it all up in defense of us.

I want to thank all 14 of the veteran service organizations who have stepped up, the national commanders who come here to the Halls of Congress to talk about the PFC Joseph P. Dwyer program.

If you go back and look at the American Legion National Commander's testimony earlier this year in front of the House and Senate VA committees, he was advocating for the Dwyer program to be expanded nationally.

It is our duty to give back, to look out for our vets and our veteran families. PFC Joseph P. Dwyer left behind a young widow, a 2-year-old daughter, a proud family, and forever they should know that this country will never forget Joseph Dwyer's service and sac-

rific. We are trying to turn it into as much of a positive as possible.

For anyone who is out there, any veteran in need, there is the Veterans Crisis Line to call and there are online chats. There are ways to reach out in your local community and nationally. Please reach out to your local Department of VA, at the very least, if you don't know of any other opportunities or resources available in your community.

There are people who live around the block from you who will drop everything in the middle of the night to help you, as I mentioned earlier. Don't give up. We have your back. We are so grateful for your service to our country. This is a great world, a great country that is worth fighting to protect and defend, and a life worth living.

Madam Speaker, I thank all of the cosponsors, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BACON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss the need to improve access to critical mental health resources for veterans battling with Post-Traumatic Stress and TBI, and to pledge my continued support on these vital issues facing our countless brave and heroic men and women who have dedicated their lives to serving our nation. It is imperative that we as a country and the United States Congress continue to work with our partners in government, industry, academia, and with private citizens to provide the best possible tools needed for their mental health and well-being.

TBI is a serious and complex injury that happens on and off the battlefield. In fact, most TBIs occur during training. While many injuries appear to be psychological, many of them are physical and are caused by actual damage to the brain because of blast exposure, heavy weaponry, or just doing the day-to-day job of a service member.

I stand firmly behind my colleague, Representative LEE ZELDIN, as a partner in his efforts and a cosponsor of H.R. 1476, the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program Act—a wonderful tool for our military that provides grants for peer-to-peer mental health support authorized by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I will continue to support efforts like this and other measures to improve the safety, research, and well-being of those who volunteer to keep our nation safe.

The timing of this cannot be more critical. We know that following the debacle in Afghanistan, we have seen a significant increase of veterans calling the suicide hotlines and, very unfortunately, we've seen an increase in suicides. Many veterans are questioning the value of their service in Afghanistan, and hurting knowing that friends and colleagues died for what General Millie has called a strategic failure. I share in that pain frankly. I encourage anyone struggling with this to reach out and get help. You are not alone. But also know, that your service was worth it. We stopped terrorism for 20 years coming out of Afghanistan and protected the homeland. We killed or captured the terrorists that masterminded 9/11. I think the decisions by President Biden were wrong in the failed withdrawal from Afghanistan, but our country will learn from its mistakes and we will rebound. We always do because we are a free country. I encourage my fellow veterans to keep the faith . . . in our God and country.

I urge my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to work together and ensure we do all we can to serve and support our men and women in uniform by keeping their physical brain health and mental health a priority.

HONORING RICHARD TRUMKA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Madam Speaker, I come before you with many wonderful colleagues to honor the life and legacy of Richard L. Trumka. Rich was a passionate and steadfast leader who committed himself to bettering the lives of working men and women in every nook and cranny of this country.

Like many made-in-America stories, Richard Trumka's had humble beginnings. He grew up in southwest Pennsylvania's coal country, the son and grandson of coal miners. He worked the mines himself, and he was able to go to college and then to law school. His talent and his charisma were hard to miss, which I guess helps explain how he came to lead one of our great and historic unions, the United Mine Workers of America, at a very young age.

As President of the United Mine Workers, Rich led the iconic Pittston Coal strike, a difficult but ultimately successful effort to fight off cuts to healthcare benefits of workers and their families. As a young activist, this labor struggle made a huge impression on me.

I knew Rich Trumka for over a quarter of a century, and I enjoyed working with him in numerous capacities. In 1995, I had the honor of running the field operation of his historic campaign to become secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, along with president John Sweeney and executive vice president Linda Chavez-Thompson. Their victory was historic because it represented the only insurgent takeover of the AFL-CIO leadership since the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations joined to create the AFL-CIO in 1955. That remains true to this day, 66 years later. Rich brought earthiness and oratory to the ticket, complementing the widely loved but more taciturn president John Sweeney from SEIU.

A mine worker from western Pennsylvania, a service worker from New York City, and a public sector champion in Linda Chavez-Thompson from Texas, they made a perfect combination and they brought big change to the labor movement in many ways.

For the next 11 years, I served as assistant director of organizing at the AFL-CIO, working closely with Rich and seeing his drive through innumerable organizing legislative and political campaigns throughout the Nation.

The picture next to me represents one such effort and one such opportunity for me to help Rich and the other officers carry out their missions.